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STREET SHEET

AFTER THE NORTH BAY FIRES, WHO IS FORGOTTEN?



Reuters. Harper Bishop (left) points to a section of his home as his wife surveys the remains.

In the wake of the North Bay fires, adequate services for chronic homeless, undocumented, and incarcerated people have been few and far between.

In the aftermath of the North Bay fires neighbors and community members have come together to offer their spaces, their extra blankets, their arms to those suffering tremendous loss. Donations have poured in from around the country, filling drop-off centers to the brim and overwhelming the emergency infrastructure falling into place. But this “disaster communism” is short lived, and it often leaves important communities behind.

One of the most prominent homeless encampments in Santa Rosa is known as Remembrance Village. Nestled behind the Dollar Store along a bike path it is a camp that has been more or less sanctioned by the city. The camp has coordinated trash

pickup and portable toilets to provide a basic level of dignity to residents, and as donations come in they go through a front desk, run by residents, who sort the items and distribute them equitably.

Immediately after the fire, residents said there was a sudden dip in donations coming through, as attention became focused on a class of newly homeless folks, but soon carloads were coming with respirators, hot meals, clothing, and toiletries. But less of those supplies made their way to those in smaller and less visible camps, or to individuals sleeping alone.

One homeless man, B, was filling in to help distribute materials to those who are being overlooked. He is staying on the

street right now while his wife and kids are in a hotel, after losing their home to the flames. B loaded up his backpack with toiletries, first aid supplies, and little bags of dog food from the back of a supply truck sent around by the Sonoma County Wobblies, one of the main groups coordinating support for longtime homeless folks in Santa Rosa in the aftermath of the fire.

“A lot of folks have been displaced from their camps, and are out here with nothing waiting to go back to check on their belongings,” he said. “It may seem insignificant to you, but it’s the world to these folks.”

With thousands of people displaced by the many fires that have swept through the North Bay Area, the need for affordable housing is more urgent than ever. While California law prohibits raising rent by more than 10 percent after an emergency has been declared, already Santa Rosa rents have skyrocketed, with some residents reporting increases between 20 and 40 percent according to the Guardian.

While all eyes are on the North Bay now, B worries what will happen a few months down the line, when attention is shifted to another disaster. He emphasized the need for long term organizing and support.

“We need your prayers. We need long term strategy. Please keep posted about what’s going on here, but also get yourself ready,” he said. “We need people organizing in their own neighborhoods. Remember that you gotta cut your own grass.”

About a mile from Remembrance Village, a man named Polo has a little camping spot set up against the fenceline of a city park. The fire burned the camp he used to live in by Kmart, and he lost everything. His motorized bike, his family photos, the letters he got while in jail, his tent, everything was charred and burnt up. “It hurts real bad because I can’t work a steady job right now. I lost everything I was able to to hustle up, and I worked so hard for those things.”

A GUIDE TO THE CITY'S NEW 5-YEAR HOMELESSNESS PLAN

The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing recently released its Five-Year Strategic Framework. Outlined in the 68-page document are ambitious goals, including reducing chronic homelessness by 50 percent and ending family homelessness—all by 2022. We take a deep dive into the strategic framework. Here's our analysis.

Coordinated Care

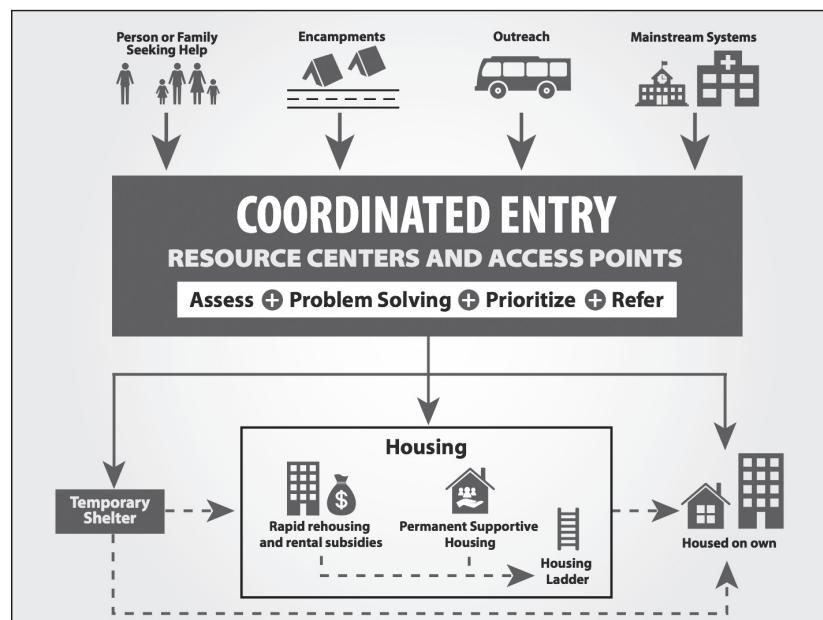
The cornerstone of the strategic framework is coordinated entry. The direction towards streamlined care, through a federally mandated process defined as Coordinated Entry, should prevent homeless people from having to runaround to different agencies as much as they do now. In essence, people experiencing homelessness would be referred to an “access point” where they would be assessed, prioritized (for example, veterans are the highest priority group amongst single adults), and referred to services. Coordinated entry is separated into three groups: youth, families, and single adults.

revenue measure that pave the way home for thousands of San Franciscans.

Instead we got the usual puffing up of everything the city in its grand benevolence is doing for the downtrodden. Overestimation of their impact. Using the lowest estimate of need available.

They claim they have helped 25,000 people exit homeless since 2005. It's important to note that the number includes thousands of bus tickets out of town. They also include turnover in housing units. That means if someone loses this housing and becomes housed again, they're doubled counted and the City has now housed two people. The actual number of 7,500 housing units and 900 subsidies is great; it's fantastic. But it is not 25,000.

The plan calls for 1424 housing units and/or subsidies over five years. They also call for 1500 prevented from becoming homeless and 800 bus tickets out of town (over five years!). We would love to see the city attempt to layout the reality for San Franciscans so they can see exactly what we are up against, and what it would take to solve the issues.



What would it take to end homelessness?

The most glaring problem with the newly released strategic framework is what they don't say. For months, we've been hearing about how this plan was slated to outline unmet needs and the resources we would need to solve homelessness.

Apparently, the Mayor's Office must have gotten their fingers on this and insisted it be a document outlining everything they are doing, not drawing attention to the many things they should be doing and aren't.

We have right now a rare opportunity in San Francisco to seriously address this issue. We have the conditions that are needed to truly affect social change. Homelessness is more visible than ever: Everyone from renters worried about joining their ranks to owners of expensive new condos who don't feel they should have to step over destitute people want to see change. At the same time, we have an untapped tax base that could easily provide the resources necessary to come as close as we can to ending homelessness here. The Department needed only to layout the need and we could collectively use that to fight for a

This is not impossible but we must be clear on how to get there.

The City is doing a lot. They have a lot to be proud of. But it is not enough. A more insightful strategic framework would have clearly defined the gaps in services and housing and then created a clear plan to work towards meeting those needs.

How many homeless people are there?

The report relies heavily on the Point in Time count, a federally mandated report that counts the number of homeless people on a single night in January. This past January, San Francisco counted an estimated 7,500 homeless people. It's a notorious undercount. Yet throughout the report, the Point in Time count is referred to, instead of the actual estimated number of homeless people who receive services annually. That number—21,000—is one that is used by the Department of Homelessness itself, and it's the number we should be referring to if we actually want to know what it would take to end homelessness.

Families Left Behind

While the strategic framework clearly expresses ending family home-

5 GOALS, 5 YEARS

- Implement a new homelessness response system through coordinated intervention
- **Adult:** Reduce chronic homelessness by 50%
- **Family:** End family homelessness
- **Youth:** Complete a detailed plan to reduce youth homelessness
- **Street Homelessness:** Improve the City's response to street homelessness and end large, long-term encampments

lessness, the Dept. of Homelessness' narrow definition of family homelessness leave hundreds of families out.

First, homeless families are also severely undercounted. While the report found that less than 3 percent of homeless families are unsheltered, it also mentions that there are around 2,000 homeless children in the San Francisco School District.

San Francisco defines homelessness for families as all those who do not have their own place to live and includes not just families in shelters and streets, but those living in hotels and motels, and families living on the floors of other people's homes. The Dept. of Homelessness has already been using a much more narrow definition of family homelessness, leaving out families who are in hotels or motels or doubled up in someone else's house. The Point in Time count only includes families in shelters, and a few who were identified as being on the streets. One can assume from the report that they are planning on ending family homelessness—but perhaps only for those who fit in their box.

They also plan to help 835 homeless families by “problem solving” in the next five years. Problem solving is to provide one-time support to people who can resolve their homelessness without the need of ongoing support. For example, a family could receive a small amount of money to pay a utility bill so they can stay in their apartment. But for families who are living on the couches or floors of other people's homes, reaching out to the city is a cry for help to get out of these situations. These families face severe hardship: There could be active drug use in the house, or parents being forced to trade sex for a place to stay. These families would also be left out of the main services from the Dept. of Homelessness and only be able to access “problem solving.”

Ending Homelessness

We want homelessness to end. We've seen tens of strategic plans, ten year plans, five year plans, and strategic frameworks to end homelessness. Plans are good—if they are realistic in identifying the actual needs of the homeless population and consequently working to address those unmet needs. We hope that the Dept. of Homelessness will let San Franciscans know exactly what we need to end homelessness and how we are going to get there. ■

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS

The STREET SHEET is a project of the Coalition on Homelessness. The Coalition on Homelessness organizes poor and homeless people to create permanent solutions to poverty while protecting the civil and human rights of those forced to remain on the streets.

Our organizing is based on extensive peer outreach, and the information gathered directly drives the Coalition's work. We do not bring our agenda to poor and homeless people: They bring their agenda to us. We then turn that agenda into powerful campaigns that are fleshed out at our work group meetings, where homeless people come together with their other community allies to win housing and human rights for all homeless and poor people.

WORKGROUP MEETINGS

AT 468 TURK STREET

HOUSING JUSTICE WORK GROUP Every Tuesday at noon

The Housing Justice Workgroup is working toward a San Francisco in which every human being can have and maintain decent, habitable, safe, and secure housing. This meeting is in English and Spanish and open to everyone!

HUMAN RIGHTS WORK GROUP Every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m.

The Human Rights Workgroup has been doing some serious heavy lifting on these issues: conducting direct research, outreach to people on the streets, running multiple campaigns, developing policy, staging direct actions, capturing media attention, and so much more. All those down for the cause are welcome to join!

To learn more about COH workgroup meetings, contact us at : 415-346-3740, or go at : www.cohsf.org

STREET SHEET STAFF

The Street Sheet is a publication of the Coalition on Homelessness. Some stories are collectively written, and some stories have individual authors. But whoever sets fingers to keyboard, all stories are formed by the collective work of dozens of volunteers, and our outreach to hundreds of homeless people.

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AS TOLD BY KENADI SILCOX

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NOV 1, 2017

STREET
SHEET

I came to San Francisco about twenty years ago 'cause jobs were kind of scarce for me. I came to California to change myself and find more opportunity and cause I didn't like the snow too much in Toledo, Ohio, which is where I'm from. I mean it's nice to look at from the window but I don't like to be in it. When I was a kid I didn't really have a lot of time to myself cause I came from a family of ten. I have 7 brothers and 2 sisters; I'm the seventh of ten children. My mother passed away around the same time as my father got sick. He was a strict father, but he had to be. My mother was a lot more easy-going; she had pretty blue eyes long dark hair, very ivory colored 'cause she was from Virginia and my father was from Texas and I'm half Aztec Indian on his side. It was kind of a Lucy and Ricky thing. I love my family; we used to have Thanksgiving dinners together every year and I'd cook for everyone cause I'm a pretty good cook.

It was a lot of fun growing up, I had chances to visit aunts and uncles in Virginia. I remember being nine years old visiting my cousin Junior in Virginia (We were both the same age.) and one time he decided to play a trick on me. He said he would show me how to ride a horse. So he's showing me and I get on the horse. We're trotting around. I tugged to the right and it goes right, tugged to the left and it goes left, give it a bounce and it goes a little faster pace but then I said, "Junior, how do I get it to go faster?" and he tells me to kick the sides and I believed him. I flew off that horse, and my butt was sore for two days after.

I've done a lot for a living. I've been a cab driver, I've been a truck driver, I worked as a cashier at Burger King, McDonald's, and Taco Bell. The one that I liked the most was when I worked for Best Western. One time when I was working, the Temptations came in and were staying at our hotel. At that time my bellman wasn't on duty, so I met the manager and took them to their hotel room, and they liked me so they gave me an \$80 tip. That job I liked 'cause you could give people discounts too so the nicer you were to me, the nicer I was to you! I also worked as a chef and went to cosmetology school for a while.

Something I'm most proud of is writing the article I wrote in the *Street Sheet* in May 2012. It's called "Letter from the Street," and it's about me living in Oakland and Richmond as well as here in the city of San Francisco. It has a lot to do with having faith cause I'm also a Catholic, I've been going to church for 30 years. A lot of people liked it, I had girls coming up to me crying when they read it!

I'm proud of the volunteer work I've done; I think volunteering is important. I've done a lot of volunteer work at Saint Vincent DePaul in Oakland. Even if it's volunteering and you're not getting paid, later on there might be greater incentives. I'm also glad I'm not dead cause I've been shot before too, I had a bullet in my foot.

I've got friends all over the city. There's a man named Chris, he's gotta be 6'7 who works as a chef at Park 55 who gives me ice water whenever I ask for it. Then I've got my friend Suzie and she works in the gift shop. I get around on the block, believe me! Some of my friends are like family to me cause I spend a lot of time with them. I think it's important to have friends, to have a structure

in the community. I'm proud to have friends, it's not always easy to keep good friends. My friend D just told me about a man named Steve, he works at a laundromat, who will do your laundry for free at nine in the morning on Fridays. I'm glad I had friends that would tell me about that, and now I get to tell my homeless friends about it. That's true friendship right there.

I ended up leaving San Francisco for a little bit to go to Oakland for a few months. I worked across the street from the Oakland Police Department as a janitor. I liked Oakland a lot better cause the people in San Francisco are, y'know, a little more snooty and over there they're more calm. When I was in Oakland I was doing more AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings 'cause you had to do AA meetings every week in the program I was in. I ended up leaving though because my job in the program wasn't enough money. They paid me \$5 a week and that just wasn't enough since I was still a drinker even though I was going to AA meetings, so it was either that or trying to borrow money from folks which I didn't like to do. I left that job and got one in Labor Ready where they had me making tree stands for Christmas trees and we got paid better money. One day I got an idea to check out this agency that did temporary services, Certified Temp Agencies. I got a job through them doing outdoor lighting for companies like Kmart and they gave me my own office.

I had moved to Berkeley 'cause my job ended due to budget cuts, and I was staying at a shelter when my friend said, "Daniel, if you ain't working, you need to draw unemployment." And I said, "Well, I don't really want to draw unemployment, I'd rather find a job." But I gave it a shot and within a few weeks I had a check coming in. So I just did that for about a year and a half, but in-between that time I moved back to San Francisco and that's where I met my friend TJ. He came up to me and I was smoking a cigarette and he asked if he could have a cigarette. Next thing I know, everywhere I go I'm seeing him. He was about 22 or 23 and he would not leave me alone, so we hung out for eight years and we hung out almost day and night. Wherever he was, I was. And one day he goes "Daniel, why don't you sell *Street Sheet*?" He was already a vendor. I said, "I don't know," 'cause to me it felt like panhandling which I wasn't into but he kept mentioning it to me so after a week I decided to try. And that's how I became a *Street Sheet* vendor.

He coached me for two weeks straight and I give him that credit cause he really helped me out. The first couple times we were down in the Powell BART station selling and he'd be circling around me going, "I can't hear you Daniel!" I'd just tell him to shut the hell up, which I could do cause I knew him but if anybody else tried, they wouldn't be able to get away with it.

I ended up coming up with my own ways to sell and it was working out better! I've been doing it for almost five years now I think. I've written, I even worked the front desk for a while, and I sell *Street Sheet*.

Some people say I'm pretty and I agree that I'm handsome but I also want people to know that when they walk by me or come up to me that I'm going to say hello and if you stand next to me, I'm going to ask you your name, I'll believe it, and I will remember it. ■



Photo: Robert Gumpert

A LETTER FROM THE STREETS BY DANIEL PEÑA

To exist in this world, I'd say you have to utilize your time wisely. A good way to do that is to volunteer at an agency that has a connection to the homeless community like St. Vincent De Paul, Henry Robinson in West Oakland or your church. I volunteered at St. Mary's Cathedral helping prepare sandwiches for homeless people. I'm currently homeless myself. I stay at Sanctuary at Eighth and Howard. It's a great place for anyone who needs help.

I believe that God really loves us because he knows there are some really good people on this Earth that He has given us to help us be successful in our ways. If we are sensible, we can be better people.

I believe in helping people to be better in our community. I have lived in Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, and now San Francisco. I have volunteered in all those places where I've stayed and I've gained a lot of friends in those communities. I have great respect for most of the friends I've met in those four cities. I really and truly enjoy helping out the communities in those areas.

I also believe that providing services such as volunteering can help people that are in a recovery transition. It would be constructive to their lives and conducive to their treatment. Believe me, I have to say, I'm living proof. Sharing our time with one another is essential.

I just recently visited some friends Jason and Ryan of mine whom are homeless and I'd say that they are in pretty good spirits. They are pretty impressive because you see my friends play the guitar and are excellent with it too! Each one has a unique way of playing the guitar I have to mention that they play at different locations to earn extra money. Some time when you are walking by, take a second to notice them. Pay a little attention if you would and say hello to them and hear the style of music that they play. It only takes a minute out of your day, if you will that is. It's really nice. I have some friends that are great in playing the Piano also; similar to Bach or Beethoven.

I have spent some time with my friend Tony J. who is one of my significantly special friends in my life who I really care about as a person and is truly a special friend to me. I am trying to get him to come to the shelter but he won't. I would like to see him off the streets. He is too much more than that to me. I guess he is okay with being outside, you know. So we walked a few blocks uphill, because he wanted to rest in a safe and quiet place, and were worn out. We found one. It was nice and peaceful, you know. We had great conversation and a nice time reminiscing about old times. It was so cool to me and I believe to him also. I really care about my friend so much and God knows what I'm talking about too.

My friend starting singing this rap song and I really enjoy his singing I think he is awesome, you know. He's got rhythm and soul and he rhymes well with clear meaning in his music. To me, he is one of many hidden talents we have here in San Francisco.

CLEARING THE SNAKEPIT

TJ JOHNSTON

The route to the Snakepit homeless encampment is as circuitous as the name suggests. Taking Muni in any direction involves a stop requiring a 10-minute walk to Seventh and King streets in what's now called the Mission Bay neighborhood. That trip concludes with a dead end that's fenced off by the Caltrain line and shadowed by the Interstate 280 overpass.

This is — or was — the terrain that made the Snakepit one of the longest surviving camps while the City disbanded several other encampments throughout San Francisco.

At least that was until on October 19 at 7 a.m., when San Francisco police announced to the occupants of the 25 remaining tents and tiny wooden houses that they had to vacate the area.

Within an hour staff from the Department of Public Works and the SF Homeless Outreach Team arrived, as did observers from the Coalition on Homelessness, which publishes Street Sheet, and the Democratic Socialists of America.

There was some question about DPW's "bag and tag" procedures when a worker claimed he would only collect a bag of a person's clothes and a bag of medicine, but otherwise, the "resolution," as the City likes to call the procedure, seemed to be a by-the-book operation. That hasn't always been the case with other clearances, where workers don't follow City rules requiring prior notice, leaving encampment residents displaced.

The Snake Pit is one of many encampments that has been "resolved" by the City's Encampment Resolution Team. More than three weeks prior, yellow notices were tied to tents and poles around the encampment stating that people would be unable to stay past October 19. The notices also outlined services that would be provided, including access to the City's Navigation Centers and treatment for substance dependency.

Another notice was posted on the afternoon of October 16. Per the City's protocol, SF Department of Public Health employees posted 72-hour abatement notices written in English, Spanish and Tagalog. The notices cited Section 581 of the health code, declaring the Snakepit a public health hazard because of "accumulation of garbage, human feces, discarded hypodermic needles, urine and a significant rodent infestation."

DPW staff brought a large trash compactor to dispose of the larger tents and accompanying furniture, while shoveling smaller debris into trash cans. But they were also dressed in coveralls that resembled hazmat suits. This apparently reinforces the "threat to public health" frame officials have been using to signal camp removals. It was also used to justify last year's evacuation of

a tent settlement on Division Street.

Most of the residents reported being already offered services, such as a bed in one of the Navigation Centers, before the camp's dismantling. Still, that morning, two people didn't have anywhere to go until Jason Albertson from the HOT Team made referrals on the spot. Albertson declined to explain further, citing medical confidentiality.

At least one other person, Street Sheet has learned, was running into delays in her Navigation Center placement. Former resident Sirena Gibson was about to get rid of her oft-overheating Nissan Quest.

"I was gonna give to the wrecking lot, but I'm glad I didn't," said Gibson, who was still staying in her car pending a call from the HOT team. She was supposed to start her 30-day stay at the center on October 23, but hasn't gotten confirmation from her contact from HOT.

"She's flaking out on me," she said. "I don't like it."

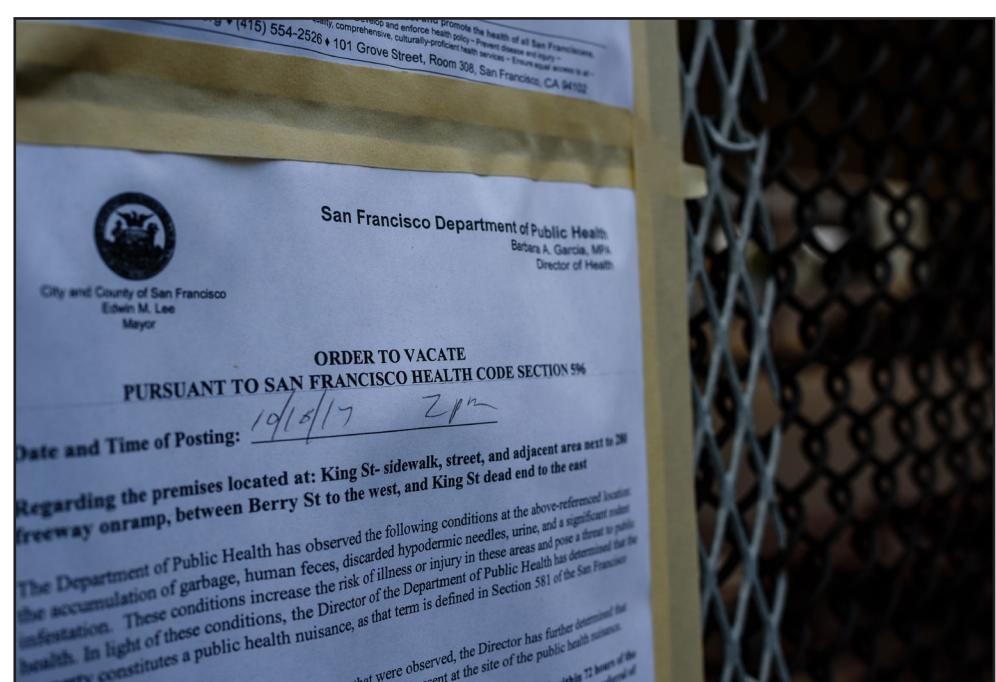
But one question about "resolution" remains unanswered: Where do they go when their 30 or days or so at the Navigation Centers are up?

The resolutions have also underscored San Francisco's ongoing gentrification saga. Most encampment clearances usually start with complaints from their housed neighbors and merchants, usually from calls to 311, and result in some contact between the camp dwellers and law enforcement. Since last year, other city agencies, such as the Departments of Public Health and Public Works, have also become involved.

Near the Snakepit, most complaints focused on car break-ins, discarded hypodermic needles and garbage. While it's easy to pit condo dwellers making six-figure salaries against the less well-heeled, it has been residents of Crescent Cove Apartments, a below rate-market complex of 234 units abutting the encampment, who alerted the City.

Crescent Cove is a property that the nonprofit Chinatown Community Development Center co-owns and manages, and it sits near a growing design district in the Mission Bay neighborhood. The development center's website says the building is "targeted for populations at 50 and 60 percent of rents in the area." Curiously enough, it also sits in what real estate site RentCafé deems as one of the 20 most expensive ZIP codes in the U.S.: The median rent in the 94158 ZIP is \$3,931 per month. If Crescent Cove units fetch rents in the \$2,000 range, using those measurements, they would still be out of range for most homeless people on disability and other safety-net incomes.

By the afternoon, police barricaded the sidewalk — as they have with other former encampment sites. ■



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

When you're homeless, knowing the law sometimes keeps the law from stepping on you. The Coalition on Homelessness has created this Know Your Rights resource for the hundreds of tent encampment residents who are harassed by the San Francisco Police Department and the Department of Public Works (DPW) to "move along" out of public space even when they have nowhere to go. DPW routinely clears encampments and throws people's belongings away—including essential items like medicine, clothing, sentimental items, and shelter, despite the fact that homeless people have the right to their things. Please share this information with people living in encampments.

IF YOUR BELONGINGS AREN'T AT THE DPW LOT OR HAVE BEEN DESTROYED BY CITY WORKERS, YOUR NEXT OPTION IS TO FILE A CLAIM.

- Claim needs to be filed within 6 months.
- Take pictures of your belongings (before confiscated) to file with your claim as well as any witness statements.
- You can get a claim form at www.sfcityattorney.org/claims/
- You can also get a claim form (and help filling it out) at the Coalition on Homelessness office or at the Free Legal Services Clinic.

If your claim is denied or you don't get a response in 45 days the next step is to file a small claims lawsuit against the City.

There may be a class action lawsuit filed against the City for these human rights violations, so bring your claim forms to the Coalition on Homelessness office or to the Free Legal Services Clinic.

YOUR RIGHTS WITH COPS IN PUBLIC PLACES PROTECT YOUR BELONGINGS

- Photograph your belongings, keep receipt, etc. Any way to document.
 - Tag your belongings with your contact information to show it's not abandoned. Take a photo of the tag.
- What to do when you encounter enforcement:
- Remain calm and cool!
 - Ask for their card- or look for badge #.

Right to remain silent

- If cops try to question you ask, "Am I being detained or am I free to go?"
- If you are free to go, you may walk away. If you are being detained, you still do not have to answer any questions.
- If you want to be cited out after an arrest, you may need to prove your name, address, and birthday to the officer.

Right to an Attorney

If you are arrested, you have the right to an attorney. If you ask for an attorney to be present, cops must stop questioning you.

Right to be free from searches

- If cops are detaining you, they may pat you down

for weapons. But they are not allowed to look through your pockets or your things.

- If cops want to search you, you should tell them and witness, "I do not consent to this search." It may not stop the search but it may stop them from using things they find against you.

If you are on probation and parole

- You still have the same rights to remain silent and to have an attorney if you are arrested.
- You probably waived the right to be free from searches for the duration of your probation/parole. But, you still should not verbally consent to a search.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR BELONGINGS HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY THE CITY:

We recommend doing this within 72 hours!

- When SF police take property from a sidewalk they are supposed to bring it to the Department of Public Works yard where it is supposed to be held for 90 days, a period specified by California law.

THE PROCEDURE THAT DPW MUST FOLLOW:

Items picked up by the DPW are bagged and tagged. DPW will NOT bag wet or moldy clothing, wet or moldy bedrolls or food items (or anything else with health concerns). The tag on the bagged items should include:

- Date and time of the pickup
- Location of the pickup
- Name of the owner (if known)
- Brief description of the contents
- SFPD badge number (if involved)

To get your belongings back:

The location of the DPW Storage Yard is 2323 Cesar Chavez St. (intersection of Kansas and Marin). Open Tuesday through Saturday 9am to 3pm. Ask the guard at the gate for assistance.

Before going to the yard be prepared to provide the following information. Without this information, the DPW employees may not be able to help you.

- Date and time of the pickup
- Location of the pickup
- Description of the items
- SFPD badge number (if one was provided)

If there is no guard at the gate, call for Public Works staff on the intercom, or call the Radio Room at 415-695-2134 & someone from DPW will come to assist you.

FREE LEGAL SERVICES CLINIC GLIDE- 330 ELLIS STREET MONDAY & THURSDAY- 2PM-5PM

AT THE CLINIC YOU CAN GET:

- BRIEF LEGAL ADVICE
- REFERRALS TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS
- INFORMATION
- LIMITED LEGAL SERVICES

QUESTIONS? EMAIL LEGALCLINIC@GLIDE.ORG OR CALL 415-674-6149

COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS 468 TURK ST. @ LARKIN SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102 415-346-3740

MONDAY-THURSDAY
9:AM-5:00PM
FRIDAY- 9AM-NOON
WWW.COHSF.ORG

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DOES SAN FRANCISCO NEED NEW YORK'S "RIGHT TO SHELTER" LAW?

CRYSTAL YU

One stands as the financial and cultural hub of the world. The other is the center of the global tech universe. In the battle between New York and San Francisco, residents of these two iconic cities are quick to list reasons why their city is superior.

But historically, the two are more similar than they are different. Often dubbed the "New York of the West Coast," San Francisco has long stood as the shining capital of liberalism for the western United States. Together, they have paved the way for American progressivism for decades, forging unprecedented ground on a number of political, environmental, and social issues.

But when it comes to matters of homelessness, San Francisco falls oddly short. In fact, compared to its eastern counterpart, San Francisco has made remarkably little progress in helping its homeless population. As the two cities with the largest homeless populations in the country, it bears asking why San Francisco is consistently at the center of the "homeless debate," while New York seems strangely absent.

The Dawn of Homelessness

To fully understand the situation, one must take a brief stroll back to the late 1970s, when the country showed the first signs of mass homelessness since the great depression.

Contemporary homelessness didn't emerge until the late 1970s, in New York City. Before then, the homeless population largely consisted of a small number of those who were down on their luck; generally, middle-aged white men who had lost their jobs, and were often suffering from health issues or alcohol and drug addictions. These men were living in skid row areas like the Bowery, out of sight from the rest of New York's populace. It was not mass homelessness.

But when the late 1970s hit, the homeless population suddenly became much more visible. They began showing up in every neighborhood, with countless numbers of people sleeping in the streets, on church steps, and in public squares. And they bore new faces: young people, children, families, and minorities. New York's landscape became dotted with an unfamiliar and unsettling scene.

Mass homelessness in the seventies emerged for a number of reasons. Some cite the deinstitutionalization of mental health care, which released mentally ill patients from large state facilities during that time. Others point the finger to growing substance abuse. Scholars tend to propose the rapid rise in income inequality as the main reason, with the widening gap in the housing market making it difficult for poorer people to afford housing. But the underlying reason was a federal divestment from housing: Reagan, who was the president at the time, cut the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development by 77 percent, leaving state and local governments with little to offer their constituents.



A homeless youth shelter in New York City.

The homeless population in New York was one the city could no longer ignore. Forced to fend for themselves on the streets, the homeless began suffering terrible injuries, with many dying as a result. The city was faced with an urgent and growing problem.

History is Made

Enter Robert Hayes: a fresh-faced, 26-year old lawyer who was just starting to make a name for himself on Wall Street. Hayes, who received his law degree from N.Y.U., was living in the Washington Square neighborhood in 1979, right when the tides of homelessness were starting to surge.

Noticing the many homeless people on and around his street, Hayes grew curious about their stories. He began to chat with them, and what started as simple curiosity blossomed into hundreds of hours of interviewing homeless New Yorkers. They spoke of the difficulties in being forced to live on the streets. Some were denied shelter entirely. The ones who were admitted into city shelters described the horrors of having to stay in one. These shelters were dangerous, degrading, unsanitary, and overcrowded.

Hayes was shocked at what he heard. He concluded that the city and state were neglecting their legal obligation to provide safe, humane shelter for the city's homeless. In October 1979, Hayes filed a class-action lawsuit against the city on behalf of all homeless New Yorkers, in a trial that would come to be known as the landmark case of *Callahan v. Carey*.

The lead plaintiff, Robert Callahan, was a homeless man suffering from chronic alcoholism whom Hayes found sleeping on the streets in the Bowery, New York City's skid row. The defendant, Hugh L. Carey, was the then-governor. Hayes

argued that the city was legally required to provide the proper aid, care, and support for the needy, as outlined in the New York State Constitution.

In a short but fierce battle, the New York State Supreme Court eventually issued a ruling in December 1979, in favor of Robert Callahan and the rest of the homeless population. The city and state were ordered to provide emergency shelter for homeless men immediately, in light of the harsh winter that was around the corner. Almost instantly, homeless people disappeared from the streets into whatever makeshift shelters the city could create.

And thus, *Callahan v. Carey* became a landmark victory for homeless people everywhere. Tragically, Robert Callahan himself died on the streets of the Bowery shortly before the law was signed. But under his name, the case cemented the first rights for homeless people in the country, and spawned a furious debate over what is now known as the "Right to Shelter."

An Inalienable Right

Since the law was passed in 1979, it's paved the way for further legal victories that would provide shelter for homeless men, women, children, and families across New York City. The right to shelter policy mandates the city to provide shelter for New Yorkers who are homeless by "reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction," regardless of whether funding exists.

The city currently has over 280 shelters, with more on the way. But the homeless problem is too large to contain only in shelters. When there are none available, the city turns to "cluster" sites (privately owned apartment buildings used to house homeless families), which can often be dangerous, or hotel rooms, which can cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

Today, there are at least 61,000 adults

and children living in just the city shelters in New York, and the numbers show no signs of stopping. Every year, more homeless people show up at shelter doors, and the city spends billions of dollars a year providing for its growing homeless population. The law is obviously not without its faults, and is often a point of controversy among New York residents. Critics say that the right to shelter discourages people from self-sufficiency, incentivizes more people to claim homelessness, and encourages nearby out-of-staters to take advantage of the law, thereby increasing the number of homeless people in New York each year. Advocates argue that the mandate could be interpreted as a coercive law—one that punishes homeless people for being homeless and criminalizes poverty. With cities across the nation forcing homeless people out of public space, a "Right to Shelter" could very well be the best tool to do so, despite poor shelter conditions. More often, the argument against the law is that it institutionalized thousands of poor and working class New Yorkers in congregate settings with no way out of homelessness, as it traps millions of dollars in municipal resources to be spent on shelters instead of housing.

But advocates for the right to shelter mandate argue that it is a moral responsibility to provide shelter for all. Indeed, the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

And since there is no real proof that

the right to shelter is directly contributing to a rise in homelessness, the city continues to provide for its homeless population, despite serious financial ramifications. Perhaps the more important right is a right to housing.

The City by the Bay

So, where does that leave San Francisco? The city's homeless population is one of the largest in the nation, second only to New York City. While San Francisco has no doubt taken great strides to provide for its homeless, the fact remains that there are still thousands of unsheltered San Franciscans sleeping in the streets, in front of doorways, in public parks, and in metro stations. The question is, why hasn't a right to shelter law been passed in San Francisco? Or, perhaps the larger question: Would a mandate like that even be possible for the City by the Bay?

The short answer is no, and it's probably a no-brainer as to why. San Francisco, with its 49 square miles of land, is significantly smaller than New York City. There simply isn't enough land to build the necessary shelters for the city's approximately 7,499 documented homeless people (plenty more remain undocumented). With Silicon Valley causing a massive influx of new, wealthy residents into the city, space is very much at a premium—and the homeless population just isn't being prioritized. And, of course, the zoning laws that have indirectly contributed to San Francisco's rapid-fire gentrification certainly aren't helping the homeless situation either.

The weather also plays a part. New York has to deal with grueling winters and freezing temperatures, which carry dangers of frostbite and hypothermia. In fact, the main reason Callahan v. Carey was enforced so quickly was due to the looming winter ahead, and the massive risks it posed for homeless New Yorkers. San Francisco, with its temperate climate and mild seasons, lacks the same urgency in protecting its homeless from the elements.

As is always the case, however, the true reason why San Francisco doesn't have a right to shelter law is a complicated one. When the homeless crisis hit the streets of San Francisco in the mid-1980s, the city was right alongside the rest of the country in providing people with relief

(namely, a roof, a bed, and a sandwich). The prevailing thought was to give the homeless a place to rest and recover, so they could quickly get back on their feet.

Obviously, this didn't work as planned. Cities across the nation grappling with homelessness discovered that temporary shelters accomplished very little in easing the number of homeless citizens. They soon realized what we know today: the only way to deal with homelessness is to tackle the root of the cause, whether it's mental illness, substance abuse, disabilities, joblessness, eviction—and just plain, ol' poverty.

The unfortunate reality for San Francisco was that doing anything more than providing a bed for a night would be much too costly for the city.

That isn't to say that officials didn't try. While it hasn't had a right to shelter law like its East Coast sister, San Francisco has still been a national leader in homelessness initiatives. The city was one of the first to create shelters that also provided mental health and substance-abuse counselors on site (unfortunately, these shelter-counsel facilities are now only traditional shelters). Over the past 15 years, the city has put a roof over the heads of thousands of people. And in the last year, San Francisco spent \$275 million on homelessness and supportive housing—and that number is projected to reach \$305 million in the next year.

But even with all its best efforts, San Francisco hasn't been able to improve its homeless situation. Much as it was 20 years ago, the city is alive with the grim scenes of those who are left to carve out a living on the streets.

The Shelter Problem

It is worth mentioning that there are only three jurisdictions in the United States that currently guarantee a right to shelter: the state of Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Each one has varying degrees of regulations and enforcement. (Philadelphia also implemented a right to shelter mandate for a brief period in the mid-1980s to 1990s, but both Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia rolled back their laws when the financial obligations became too much for the cities.)

San Francisco has a handful of shel-

ters, most of them for emergency or short-term cases. They range from traditional shelters run by nonprofits, to facilities that cater to specific groups, like young adults, families, or the LGBTQ community. In total, the city has a little more than 1,200 shelter beds available for the single adult homeless population.

A homeless person can get an emergency shelter bed for one night fairly quickly, but anything else is a lengthy process. Those seeking supportive housing, longer-term shelter beds, or any kind of service need to register at one of the city's four shelter registration sites, then join a waitlist that could last for months. Waitlists are consistently over 1,000 people long. Some, like the public housing list, are so long, they close.

Then, there's the actual shelter itself. Shelters come with rigid rules: men and women aren't allowed to sleep together, pets and belongings are limited, strict curfews are enforced, there are no in-and-out privileges, there are set meal times, and they are often closed during the day. And shelters can be dangerous as well, with many homeless people citing theft, violence, and the temptation to use drugs as reasons why they avoid the facilities. For a lot of homeless people, it's easier and safer to stay on the streets rather than go through the hassle of finding a shelter bed.

These problems aren't unique to San Francisco shelters; New York's homeless people face similar circumstances. But in an unfortunate twist, homeless New Yorkers oftentimes don't even have the choice to stay on the streets. In addition to its right to shelter law, New York has passed other initiatives regarding the treatment and care of the homeless, one of which includes forcibly removing homeless people from the streets and placing them in shelters involuntarily (again, a law driven largely by the threats of winter in New York).

It's clear that shelters as they exist now—whether emergency, short-term, or permanent—are not a true solution.

A New Solution

Luckily, San Francisco has recently made significant progress in innovating its shelter program. With the opening of the Navigation Centers in the Mission District, the Civic Center Hotel, and the

Dogpatch neighborhood, the city may finally be inching closer to a more feasible solution for helping its homeless.

Unlike traditional homeless shelters, the Navigation Centers don't have the rigid rules that keep many homeless people away. Residents can come and go as they please, and eat whenever they want. Partners can sleep next to each other, pets are allowed, and all belongings can be stored safely at the Center.

But perhaps the biggest difference is the supportive services offered at the Navigation Centers. Reminiscent of the shelter-counsel facilities the city tried to operate in the 1980s, the Navigation Centers focus on working with the residents to figure out a solution to end their homelessness. Each person is assigned a case manager, who will help make medical appointments, get proper identification cards, qualify for government benefits, find permanent housing, or, for some, get a bus ticket home. They are able to access mental and physical care, addiction counseling, and even reconnect with estranged family members.

Of course, the cost in running these Navigation Centers is much higher compared to traditional shelters. While a traditional shelter bed costs an average of \$36 a night to operate, Navigation Center beds cost around \$69 a night due to the more involved case management for each resident.

But these are shelters that some homeless people prefer to stay at, although exits into housing has been few and far between. While some are offered permanent supportive housing, many are forced to exit out of the shelter after 30 to 60 days. People like Navigation Centers and the City is committed to maintaining and opening more Navigation Centers, which at least three more planned in the next two years, but there must be housing if real progress is to be made.

There will unlikely ever be a true one-size-fits-all solution for homelessness at the city and state level. While the Navigation Centers represent a welcome, albeit temporary, respite from the streets, San Francisco and New York need to push not just for innovative forms of shelter, but also permanent, affordable housing for its homeless populations. ■

FROM NORTH BAY FIRES PAGE 1

The Wobblies, as well as many churches and community groups, have provided basic supplies to homeless folks all over Santa Rosa in the wake of the fires. Donations of toothpaste, shampoo, hydrocortisone, sweaters, tents, sleeping bags, and inflatable mattresses have piled up in the homes of volunteers and then been loaded into vehicles to distribute around the city. They see themselves as filling in gaps that have been left by the big institutional response from FEMA and the Red Cross.

"We stepped in because in the face of natural disaster there were a lot of needs to be met, and we noticed a lot of people who were houseless were ignored, neglected, and overlooked," said Frank Robes of the Sonoma County Wobblies. "So we took it

on ourselves to assist our community, be it by distributing masks, water, food, whatever is needed."

Longtime homeless folks are not the only one being overlooked during this crisis; many undocumented folks are also struggling to find stability with limited access to the resources being offered by the state. FEMA only provides financial assistance to legal citizens so a lot of the immediate relief is inaccessible to anyone without papers.

Many undocumented people have also chosen to avoid the shelters, many of which have a heavy police and National Guard presence. Although ICE has agreed not to target people at the shelters, many would prefer to provide for themselves elsewhere than take the risk in the shelters.

Large camps of immigrants and undocumented folks have popped up along the coast, where communal kitchens are being set up to feed the displaced communities and where donations have been flowing in.

But organizations like the Graton Day Labor Center have stepped in to provide the support that isn't coming from elsewhere. In coalition with a number of other groups they have created the UndocuFund, a money pot being distributed directly to families who are turned away from FEMA and other federal aid. Many within the immigrant community have lost their homes, and even more are struggling to make ends meet as they have lost their employment at the restaurants, hotels, and vineyards that burned. The fund is being used to directly support folks in finding new housing, and

to cover rent while folks are out of work.

As residents of Santa Rosa and neighboring cities grappled with the raging flames, all communication was cut to those incarcerated at the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office Main Detention Facility. According to one person in the jail, inmates were told that there was a small municipal fire, but had no idea that flames were ravaging their neighborhoods outside. Although the facility was within the bounds of the original Evacuation Area as of October 9th, no inmates were evacuated.

As long term support structures fall into place, responders will need to be vigilant to prioritize the needs of homeless people, undocumented people, and those who are incarcerated. ■

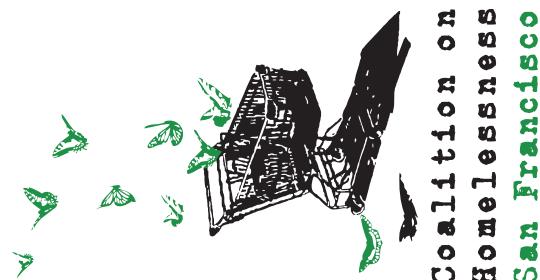


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WORD ON THE STREET

Names: Taylor Michael, 42, and Joanne Fong, 48**Place:** Design Center area along Division Street**Time without a home:** Michael: Just under a year; Joanne: Since June 2015**What does homeless mean to you?***Michael:* Well San Francisco's my home. I maybe houseless, displaced, it just means displacement.**What does home mean to you?***Michael:* Home means a place I can have my doors secured, kick by after work, or whatever it is I do during the day; it's my place, my sanctuary.*Joanne:* A home is something like you buy, I guess, and have. That you raise your family in and that's what we haven't had.**What is the most difficult thing about being without a home?***Michael:* It limits your ability to be creative.*Joanne:* Out here the most difficult thing is running water and electricity. And the toilet. Knowing where to put your garbage and not being too much of a nuisance to other people.**What does community mean to you?***Joanne:* I was wondering where that word [community] came from. Maybe it's communicate, that's where community comes from. If you are able to, willing to, communicate with each other and come together, be able to resolve something, or create something, [that's community]. A lot of people don't understand what community is cause there's a lot of people doing disservices to each other. Yah, I actually think it's about communication, what community is.*Michael:* Community? Well I break it down in a lot of different ways. Unity, I mean people don't even know what that word is now because if they did we wouldn't be in this situation. Community means everybody banding together, recognizing one another, and sharing experiences with each other. A community raises each other, takes care of each other, that's something we don't have, anyone in the US anymore. So it means nothing to me personally at this time in my life because I'm witnessing no unity at all, not in this community.**If there was one thing you wanted people to know about you, what would it be?***Joanne:* I think anybody that does know me pretty much knows who I am. I mean they know me well enough. There's nothing that I would think people needed to know particularly about me, but just that we're here.*Michael:* Human. We're all human and we are out here. But not forever. I refuse to leave this city because of a spike, or a shift in the economic and real estate crisis that we're having here. I'm just not going to do it. I went through too many years of hell paying rent, paying rent, paying rent and then getting pushed around, and even going to judges. And then getting pushed around by them too and then ending up on the streets. I'm not going to lose. I'm not going anywhere and that's how I get back in a place to call my own, make a few last songs and then I'll go. That's how I feel about it. I've been too many years here, too hard of a road, and done too wrong; the road doesn't end here. Not 'til I get back in a home again. That's what it's really about for me, just sticking it out. ■

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